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**Testimony of Susan O. Storey, Chief Public Defender
Raised Bill No. 5248, An Act Establishing a Sentencing Commission
Judiciary Committee, February 26, 2010**

The Office of the Chief Public Defender supports raised Bill No. 5248 which establishes a Sentencing Commission. There is currently no agency that focuses solely on sentencing policy. This is an area of great concern and has been in the spotlight subsequent to the Cheshire incident. While many individual agencies are involved in various aspects of criminal justice sentencing, there has never been a coordinated and collaborative approach to this complex issue, which affects so much of what we do in the criminal justice system.

The recommendation to create a Sentencing Commission comes from the successful results of the legislatively created Sentence Task Force. The Sentencing Commission as envisioned in Bill No. 5248 is an apolitical body with representation from all branches of government, all the agencies involved in the day to day operation of the criminal justice system and include community representatives with a stake in the system. This kind of collaborative and inclusive approach will serve to facilitate communication among all stake holders in terms of policy analysis and recommendations.

The mission statement and delineated duties make it clear that the long term sustainable goal is to produce a comprehensive coordinated research data base that would ultimately serve the purpose of providing the framework for sound sentencing policy analysis. It is important that the future adheres to evidence based legislative and policy decisions, rather than that based upon strictly political grounds. It is important to incorporate sound fiscal and racial diversity impact statements into the analysis of current and proposed legislation and policy.

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports this bill and will actively participate in the Commission and its work. It has the capacity to be one of the most important and sustainable pieces of criminal justice legislation to be raised in a long time. Its significance cannot be understated.